

Feature: Where do world expositions go?

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by Marzia De Giuli

MILAN, Italy, Aug. 14 (Xinhua) -- World expositions have changed through different editions but are still of today and remain an important appointment for all countries of the world, experts said here at the ongoing Expo Milano 2015 in Italy.

Matteo Gatto, Visitor Experience and Exhibition Design Director at Expo Milano 2015, explained to Xinhua that world expos have experienced diverse roles in history. The origins of the world's expositions, he recalled, lie in the Industrial Revolution.

Starting with London in 1851, world expositions were held in Europe and in other parts of the world. At the beginning they were fairs where countries celebrated their identities and strove for prestige by exhibiting achievements and imperial possession.

Later expos began to showcase advances in manufacturing, science and technology. "It was during the United States' first expo in 1876 that the telephone was first introduced to the world, while the mobile phone was revealed at the 1970 expo in Japan. Two of the world's favorite fast foods, hamburger and ketchup, also first gained fame at world expositions," Gatto noted.

Through the 20th century, expos did not only exhibit machines, manufactured products and fine arts, but also started to summarize the whole of human experience. "Visitors were looking for the future at world exposition and comparing the progress of different countries," Gatto said.

In the 1990s, he told Xinhua, a change of pattern led expos to seek to educate visitors about the world's issues and challenges. They gradually

became a central feature of conferences and infotainment which sometimes even partly overshadowed their industrial component.

This revolution, which first started with the 1998 Lisbon World Exposition in Portugal, is still happening and is pursued by big cities of the world, Gatto stressed underlining the interest expressed by important capitals such as New York, Paris and London to host the 2025 edition.

In his view, expos will continue in this direction, "although this does not mean that they will transform into NGOs and lose their industrial spirit."

"But the fact that we are having over 100,000 international visitors per day at the Milan expo even with the mid-August blazing hot weather is the evidence that expos celebrate cooperation and peaceful competition among nations," he stressed.

Guido Abbattista is a professor of modern history at the University of Trieste and has dedicated studies and papers to world expositions.

"Expos have changed through some 160 years of history and will continue to evolve, yet remain a key international appointment," he said.

Abbattista highlighted the role of "showcase" that expos have in presenting the best of each participant country and even of visitors. "In the past expos used to especially celebrate the excellencies of the organizing nation, while today they celebrate the excellencies of different cultures, offering an occasion of knowledge exchange and confrontation on global issues," he agreed with Gatto.

In his view, an "interactive spirit" will increasingly characterize expos in the future. This process has already begun by placing visitors at the heart and actively involving them in the expo events.

Among the most recent examples, Abbattista noted, the Milan expo has added new elements such as the clusters, or shared exhibition areas which group countries devoid of self-built pavilions around common themes, and the "expo by night" which offers a variety of entertainment

events to visitors.

"I think that the fascination of expos lies in their being a sort of time machines which build themselves on the past but are projected into the future of humankind. In fact they are a mirror of the world's evolution," Abbattista told Xinhua.

For all these reasons, he went on saying, world expositions are "irreplaceable." Internet has been an incredible revolution for expos, which today have much more instruments at disposal to organize events and spread information.

"But expos will never become a virtual place. There will always be the need for the emotional experience provided by a physical place where all cultures and citizens of the world can meet and talk to each other. I have asked my students to take a virtual tour of the Expo Milano 2015 on the Internet in order to better be able to enjoy the feeling of our journey there in September," Abbattista said.



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